

Issue 21

April 2019

Steer

STEER YOUR BUSINESS | THE MAGAZINE

Meet the Team

Sally Marshall

Oh no! My new hire is leaving

Saffron Gallacher

3 ways to improve your keyword research

Ray St.Clair

The challenges of

Employing people

Mara Thorne

Editor's Review

The weather is changing as we move into Spring but is your business changing too? Standing still in your business should never be an option and this month we have some more fabulous articles to help inspire, motivate and help you to grow.

Jo Humphrey talks us through self-paced training versus training in person. Which do you prefer? Often it depends on what the course is for. Personally, I always prefer the face-to-face training where I can ask questions as I go along but everyone is different. The key for businesses is that they are embracing training and upskilling their staff.

Talking of staff, what challenges do you face when employing people? This is always a big step, but Mara gives us some advice on things we need to think about when we contemplate taking on new staff.

Saffron then follows up with steps you need to take in order to keep your staff. Appointing them is one thing but how do you work with them to ensure that they deliver what you're expecting, and that they are happy working in your business. It's not always as easy as you think!

Maybe employing staff is a step too far at the moment but what about outsourcing some of your tasks to a virtual assistant. The first step could be your phone calls. Miss MPS give us some ideas for using a VA to answer calls rather than leaving a voicemail which is so impersonal. Definitely food for thought if you're not doing this already.

Have you ever thought about having a complete change in direction? Zoe Smith has done exactly that and is now part of the Community Driving School. Find out more about her fascinating journey in her own words. John Nicholson, the founder of the Community Driving School, featured in an earlier issue and his business is now going from strength to strength as you will see.

As you can see, we have another information packed issue for you this month with all the above and more for you to read your way through during April. We also have the Easter holidays to contend with – does that affect your business? For some businesses, public holidays, school holidays and staff holidays can play havoc with their schedules and work load. If it affects your business, why not write an article about how you cope, what the challenges are and things you can do in advance to plan.

Have a fabulous month and see you in May.

Sally



Sally
Marshall

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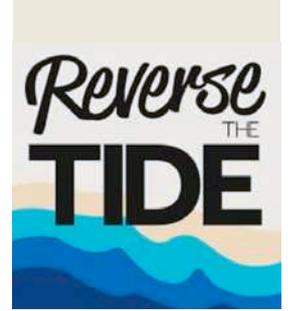
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News From the Beach!



Things happen for a reason but sometimes the reason isn't immediately clear.

My business was ticking along quite nicely and then out of the blue, everything changed. The rug was pulled from under my feet and everything turned upside down. Ordinarily that would have phased me completely but this time it didn't, but I wasn't sure why. Has that ever happened to you?

With hindsight, it seems that it was time for a change, and do I mean a change! Everything has moved up and on and I seem to be in a completely different business now which is amazing and so exciting. When I talk to business owners, they have often done the same thing in the same way for a number of years and quite frankly, got the same result. Does that sound familiar? Having a good look at what you're doing, what services you provide, what products you have and who your customers are is a good thing to do. If nothing else, it reminds you what you do and why. It might just make you question some of the things you do, inspire you to look at slightly different things, refresh products or the marketing and just have a new outlook on your business.

The big companies often do this to re-establish themselves in the market. They refresh their branding, packaging or product line and make you think they've got something new. The basics are probably still exactly the same, but the perception is that it's all new to the market. Could you do something similar with your business?

Technology changes so fast that it's often a challenge to keep up with it. Have you looked at automating some of your systems and processes recently? You might well be able to save time - and money - by using a different software package or by automating a particular area of your business. Just one small change could make a huge change. I've recently started working with a digital agency and it's made a huge difference to my business. They work across the whole business rather than just a small part of it and it is now all linking together in a much more coherent way. Someone else looking at what I'm doing is what makes the difference. We all get too close to our own business and a fresh pair of eyes can see something which is obvious to them, but you can't see. It's your baby and you don't want to see the flaws but to someone else, there is an obvious change which can be made which will make all the difference.

Don't work in isolation. Work together or with a business coach, and make your business the best it can possibly be.



Sally Marshall



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WE ARE HIRING

The Challenges of

Employing people

Most businesses are started by one or two intrepid individuals with a great idea, product or service. As the business grows, the need to employ other people becomes unavoidable. This can seem daunting, but with planning, preparation and good advice, every employment challenge can be overcome. Here are some simple but effective pointers.

Most businesses are started by one or two intrepid individuals with a great idea, product or service. As the business grows, the need to employ other people becomes unavoidable. This can seem daunting, but with planning, preparation and good advice, every employment challenge can be overcome. Here are some simple but effective pointers.

Effective recruitment

To get good talent into the business, start by identifying precisely what tasks need to be done, what salary, hours and other benefits you can offer, and what skills, experience and personal



attributes you need from your prospective recruit.

Shortlist candidates according to objective criteria, avoiding discrimination on illegal grounds like sex, race, age, disability or religion. Prepare pertinent interview questions, and consider whether work-based tests or psychometric assessments might be helpful.

Send written terms and conditions to your favoured candidate, obtain a signature, and do right-to-work checks before they start working with you.

Implement an induction plan, providing information, training and feedback, to get your new employee up to speed quickly.

Performance and conduct management

Ensure standards of performance and conduct are clearly communicated through legally-compliant and culturally-appropriate written policies: discipline and grievance, holidays and sickness, health and safety, data protection, ethical behaviour, confidentiality, use of IT, business expenses, and whatever else is key within your business.

If rules of conduct are broken, take swift, fair and consistent action. Gather the evidence, discuss the issue with the employee, identify the cause, and decide what response is appropriate. Employees have statutory rights in disciplinary situations, so take advice before you start.

Ongoing performance management, both formal and informal, is key to success. Praise and recognize good performance, and don't ignore performance problems – they rarely go away by themselves!

Reward and recognition

Most employees want job satisfaction and recognition as well as remuneration. Money talks, that's true, but alternative perks like flexible working or learning opportunities are also valued. Don't promise what you can't deliver, but do what you can to show your appreciation. Even small unexpected treats (chocolates, wine...) can be highly motivational!

Understanding what each individual values, and showing an interest in them, builds loyalty and commitment; but aim for respect and trust, rather than friendship, from your employees.

And if it doesn't work out...

If you need to dismiss an employee for any reason, swift action is best. If they have not completed two years' service they can't claim Unfair Dismissal, but certain rights - like not suffering illegal discrimination, or being dismissed for "whistleblowing" or for becoming pregnant - start on "day one", so proceed with caution. Your reason for dismissal must be fair, and you must follow a fair procedure. Getting it wrong could land you in an Employment Tribunal, so always take advice first!

Employing good people and managing them well can hugely increase your success. Guidance and support from a HR expert will ensure you avoid the potential pitfalls, and help take the pain out of growing your business through other people.

Mara Thorne is a highly experienced HR professional whose wide-ranging career started in the late 1980s and spanned a number of different industry sectors and types of organisation. From humble beginnings as a PA in a Personnel Department, she gained her Chartered CIPD qualification in 1991 and worked her way up the corporate ladder to Director-level positions, before leaving the world of large corporations to found M Thorne Consulting Limited in 2011. Her mission now, supported by two experienced Associate Consultants, is to help SME clients with their employment-related challenges, taking the pain out of "people issues", and enabling them to get on with running their businesses.



Mara Thorne



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or email mara.thorne@gmail.com
www.mthornehr.co.uk



The STEER YOUR BUSINESS TEAM



Where would a magazine such as this be without some key individuals behind the scenes, making it all happen - seamlessly every month? Well, we thought you might like to know who the team is, and how each one of us assist Sally in bringing you, our readers, this quality publication.

Nikki Holy

Business Support

It's always an adventure to see where Sally's business is going to take her next and it's great fun being along for the ride.

I also have my own business called Hand in Hand Living which creates luxury gift boxes filled with hand-made, health based products made by amazing and inspirational women. I am a firm believer is slow, mindful living and making self-care a priority and I love having a business which contributes to that ethos.



Nikki Holy

Warren Dunham

Journalist and writer

Warren's responsibilities at SYB include finding news stories and producing content. Warren is a member of the

Chartered Institute of Journalists. Warren has a 25-year career within Information Technology and works as an IT Advisor for one of Kent's oldest Technology companies, ADM Computing who are based in Canterbury.

When not working Warren spends most of his time with his two young children and elderly dog in their old caravan somewhere in the Kent countryside.



Warren Dunham

Kathy Marchant-Nel

Graphic design and layout

Kathy is the person behind the final look and feel of the magazine. She's responsible for taking all of the supplied articles and images and converting them into beautiful layouts. Kathy qualified in graphic design 21 years ago, and after working at an agency in South Africa, started



GraphicKat in South Africa in 2006, before moving to the UK and starting GraphicKat UK Ltd in 2016. Kathy's passion is good design and firmly believes "If you love what you do, you'll never work another day in your life"



Kathy Marchant-Nel

Jane Ward

Printing

Jane's role in the team is the reproduction and print of the magazine. Jane runs Parkers Design and Print, based in Canterbury. Her business can offer a wide variety of printing solutions and have an experienced team to help you decide on the format that best suits your project. She can provide all the services you need to get information to your customers on time and on budget.



Jane Ward

Clare Runham

Proofing

Clare and her team at Miss MPS carry out the proof reading of all articles that are submitted. You should never proof read your own work! Miss MPS offers general business support, VA and call Answering from their office West Malling.



Clare Runham

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OH NO!

My new hire is leaving

Where did I go wrong?

The day has finally come. After months of agonising whether you can afford to hire another person you finally decided to bite the bullet. Finding someone to trust enough to come on board has been a long journey and all the while, your workload has been increasing to suffocating levels, but you finally got there. Tomorrow is the day...

As much as we want them to hit the ground running, where new employees are concerned, slow and steady wins the race. They need your time, your commitment and your loyalty in order to return the favour.

You need to ensure two things happen:

- 1) They want to stay
- 2) They are going to be successful

So what do you do? Here are our 5 Top Tips to help you gain their commitment from Day 1:



1. Prep Like A Boss!

Even before your new colleague steps into their work environment, make sure you are ready for them. Have they received all relevant documentation? Are all of the tools to do the job readily available? All necessary technology in place and working? Is their workstation adequate? Where should they arrive? Who will they be meeting? Have you organised a tour of their workplace? Have you planned your day to ensure you have sufficient time to spend with them?

2. Make It Personal

No matter how many times we've done it, being the newbie can be daunting. Feeling welcome and wanted is so important to us on an emotional level to help us feel at ease immediately. They need to know you are ready and excited to welcome them. Consider sending a welcome card from your existing

team prior to them starting. Are your team ready to introduce themselves and welcome their new colleague on their first day? Who will they be taking lunch with? Have you considered a token welcome gift?

3. Communication is Key

The first few weeks and months of an employee cycle is pivotal in terms of learning. Be it company ethos, terms and conditions of employment, policies and procedures, health & safety factors, or job specific training; ensure a clear, smart on-boarding plan is in place. Be clear and thorough on how you will communicate these vital pieces of information - this extends way past their day one induction and orientation training.

...the day when you can finally off-load this mountain of work that has been building up. They will be the game changer. They will help you bring in sales, sort out the admin, look after the customers and finally allow you to get parts of your life back. The only thing to do is give them their log in password and show them how the coffee machine works, don't you?

Not quite. Around 20% of employees leave within the first 45 days of employment, and most employees are always on the market for work, regardless of whether they have been working with you for 5 days or 5 years. Staggering statistics, and if you are a small business, this could significantly impact your financial health.

4. Express Expectations

Take time to consider what your own expectations are for the role. What are the goals and milestones? Express your expectations in terms of job parameters, ensure your new team member is completely on board with your mission, and fully understands their responsibilities and accountabilities. Helping them to understand your business, your priorities, your culture and your company aspirations will encourage them to integrate quickly and truly feel part of the business.

5. Review, Review, Review!

Keeping the conversation going is just as important as laying the foundations for both you and your new team

member. Set regular, uninterrupted time aside to spend together. Encourage their feedback and experiences so far, provide your own in return. Consider any improvements that can be made, provide recognition and clearly communicate where they are at in terms of their learning.

There should be no surprises when the probation period is reviewed, and with a little thought and planning, you'll be on your way to creating a dream team!



Saffron Gallacher



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CAUTION: LEARNER

The Community Driving School

As I sit here, having bought my mother to a hospital appointment, I look around the waiting room in a very different light to how I would have 2 or 3 months ago. I don't wonder what stressful jobs they have, what their managers are like, or the company that they work for. I wonder what path they have trodden, what type of person they are, and what part they play in their community. Wow, such a different thought pattern!

But why?

Just a few weeks ago I left my 9-5, Monday to Friday, stressful slog that gave me nothing back. In the end it wasn't a very difficult decision to make, I needed to work to my own ethics, not be dictated to. The decision was made even easier because I had met a fantastic person, a pillar of his community, who had made me an offer that was too good to be true. To become a driving instructor, but with a difference. I was to be an instructor for The Community Driving School.

The Community Driving School was founded by John Nicholson, CEO, in 2017, not only to teach privately, but to provide driving lessons for sponsored pupils in exchange for volunteer work in the community. When John came to me and asked if I would like to jump on the CDS journey train there was only one answer I could give - yes, yes and yes again! The excitement that I felt was overwhelming, and I am so honoured to be a part of such an amazing project.

In the 5 weeks since being alongside John full time I have learnt so much, not just about my driving, but about a whole community of empathetic and generous people, and myself! Yes, he introduced me to the crazy world of networking - 6.30am breakfast meetings, after hours meetings, and lots in between. At first, I was so out of my comfort zone, away from the shelter of the office that I have shared with other colleagues for 20 years, and not being shielded by my Manager when I didn't know an answer. A real culture shock for me! Now I look forward to seeing everyone, meeting new people and spreading the word about the great work CDS has done and will continue to do. Those nervous butterflies in my tummy

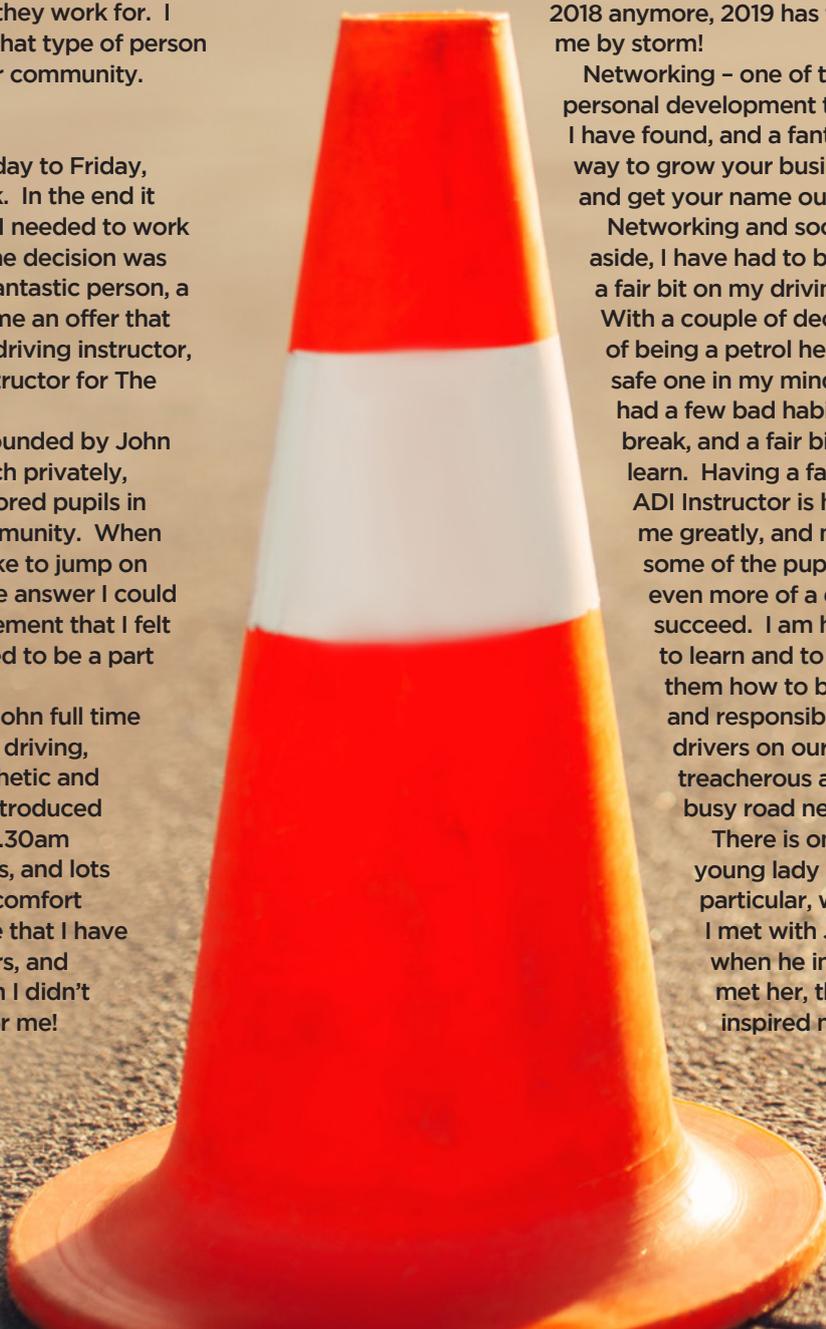
have almost gone!! Everybody I have met has been welcoming, understanding of my nerves, and given me so much support as they are watching me grow into a more confident networker! I hardly recognise the Zoe of

2018 anymore, 2019 has taken me by storm!

Networking - one of the best personal development tools I have found, and a fantastic way to grow your business and get your name out there!

Networking and socialising aside, I have had to brush up a fair bit on my driving skills! With a couple of decades of being a petrol head (a safe one in my mind) I had a few bad habits to break, and a fair bit to learn. Having a fantastic ADI Instructor is helping me greatly, and meeting some of the pupils is even more of a drive to succeed. I am hungry to learn and to teach them how to be safe and responsible drivers on our ever treacherous and busy road network.

There is one young lady in particular, who I met with John when he initially met her, that has inspired me so



much. Although she does suffer with quite severe anxiety issues, her previous driving instructor had not been sympathetic to this and her confidence was shattered. Her last lesson had actually been cut short and she had found herself on the side of the road sobbing with the instructor, who then grumpily drove her home to drop her off – in essence, she didn't really want to be in the driving seat again! She lost money because she had paid for lessons up front and didn't have the confidence to contact her to ask for a refund, such an unfair and disgusting situation.

It has been 3 months since that meeting, and wow, what a difference. Having had the understanding and calm approach that John has to his teaching, the three of us went on a half day road trip to Hastings. Her driving, was a far cry from the nervous young lady's description of herself, and so was she! She dealt with every challenge so confidently, and not an iota of anxiety showed through. I will admit, I did get quietly emotional during the journey back, seeing the difference that CDS and an understanding of a person's needs can make for those who need just a little extra TLC to gain the confidence to believe in themselves.

One of the reasons John asked me to join CDS was because of my own experience and relationship with anxiety. I have been a diagnosed sufferer for just over 18 months, but it had been going on for some time before that, I just didn't realise. My recollection of my first meeting John about a year ago, at a networking event a friend had taken me to, was me explaining to him that I had bizarrely lost the ability to drive on a motorway, or fast bit of dual carriageway. Having suffered some severe and very dangerous panic attacks on stretches of motorway that I have used a lot during my driving life. I had been adapting my journeys for mine and everyone else's safety, for about a year. This was getting rather time consuming and expensive and stopping me from doing things that I wanted to do. John said he would take me out in Jennifer (CDS car number one) and help me control the anxiety/panic attacks that were ruling my life. It took time and patience, but he did it, he helped me coach myself back onto the motorway – he gave me back part of my life and I cannot describe how incredible that has made me feel!

A person in poverty often has underlying anxiety, confidence or self-esteem issues because they feel different and excluded from some social groups. They do not necessarily have the latest pair of trainers, cannot keep up with the latest fad and probably cannot even afford a suit for a job interview. Social exclusion is a huge issue amongst those suffering from poverty, but also for others that we help. You see, The Community Driving School does not have an exhaustive list of people it will extend its hand to. If it means helping another person out of the benefit trap and back into work, we will support ex-offenders, ex-addicts, ex-servicemen or women, homeless people, young adults with learning disabilities, people with mental health issues, people who have been abused or subjected to violence. All these people deserve a chance to better their lives, build up confidence and belief in themselves, and walk with their heads held high having survived a tough and often unimaginable journey.

We are both instructors with a difference who have some understanding of anxiety, lack of confidence and self-esteem and can empathise well with our students through our own experiences. This will be the same for all future instructors too, as CDS has grown both in Kent and around the country, which will give all our pupils a huge advantage. There will be no tears born of fear or being put down or chastised. I cannot promise no tears of frustration, but that is something that can be worked through with time and patience and being able to adapt our approach to teaching. We will always go that extra mile and give a little more time whenever it is needed. Not only do our pupils have us, but we have a fantastic network of help and support available to them through our collaborative partnership. We will see them from their first lesson to well on their way to employment and a new path in life. They will understand their worth within the community.

As you can see, my decision to join Community Driving School seems more of a vocation than yet another change in job role, and it is. Not only will I take great pride in nurturing, supporting and encouraging my pupils, have a great time networking and spreading the word. I will be helping fellow human beings change their lives and becoming the amazing person they can be. Everyone deserves a chance, a huge majority deserve a second chance, and I will be someone that can give them that. So, the terrifying leap from a successful career in full time employment, to becoming a tiny fish in a huge world of self-employment doesn't seem so scary to me anymore. As the great Mother Teresa was quoted as saying:

"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the water to create may ripples"



Zoe Smith



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3

Tips to Improve your Keyword Research

Did you know that improving your SEO will help you get found online more easily? You've probably heard that implementing keywords into the content on your website, blog, and URL are key strategies for improving your SEO ranking. However, including the wrong keywords or too many keywords can be just as detrimental.

Although you may not always notice them, keywords play an integral role when it comes to helping a small business get found online. So let's get to it by breaking down the long and short (tail) of it.

Do Your Own Keyword Research

Keyword research should never be a one-time commitment, but rather an ever-changing process that involves a strategy and a comprehensive understanding of your business and your industry. Including keywords that are specific to your business and industry will help to ensure that the right customers are being driven to your door rather than just any customer. Although you want to increase your customer base, you don't want to target consumers that may not find the value in your business.

Using the Right Keywords

Short-tail keywords, or keywords composed of very generic keywords, might seem appealing because they're searched more often than long-tail keywords, however, they're also a lot more competitive. So, unless you're writing content for a large organisation, like Apple or Curry's, and consumers are likely searching specifically for your product, you don't want to enter into a sea of competitors with big brands that have even bigger pockets.

Long-tail keywords, on the other hand, may not be as frequently typed into a search engine—think, "Egg" vs. "Poached Egg with Avocado and Béchamel". By including more long-tail keywords into the content on your page, you'll attract a larger number of customers who are likely

to search for any combination of those long-tail keywords.

Location-based keywords are keywords that directly relate to your business's physical location. For example, if your business is a bakery in a popular neighbourhood in London you'll want to include not only Charlotte, but also the name of that specific neighbourhood. By doing so, you're more likely to target visitors in your area rather than across town who may or may not ever make it to your location.

Avoid Keyword Stuffing

Speaking of misleading customers that may not find value in your business, adding practically any keyword under the sun is referred to as keyword stuffing and is largely considered a taboo in the digital marketing world. Like with any other digital marketing rule of thumb, less is more and quality will always conquer quantity. Ideally, a website's content should include keywords in a natural way. However, by inputting keywords into a few sentences and repeating them over and over, you're stuffing your content with keywords. Even if they're good keywords, it's still too much.

Now that you've read through these tips, you're ready to become an SEO expert too!



Ray
St.Clair



Contact Ray St.Clair, Managing Director
MediaHaus Ltd on: **0330 0577 453** or
ray@mediahaus.uk

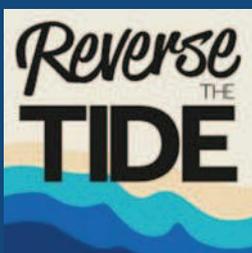
Reverse ^{THE} TIDE

Reverse The Tide aims to make a difference to the local community and environment we live in by increasing awareness amongst businesses and local communities of the impact of products and services we use and where they go when we've finished with them. The Reverse The Tide brand has been heavily adopted within the watersports community and we continue to build on our ethos of reversing the tide in respect of the damage we have done to both the environment (both land and sea) and ourselves as part of the modern way of life.

Help us Reverse the Tide



Log on to reversethetide.com and purchase any one of the amazing items we have on offer to help us REVERSE THE TIDE



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WHO
WHEN
WHERE
How?
WHAT
WHY



Training in person VS Self-paced Online Training

In this article, we discuss the benefits of having training onsite in person with a certified expert trainer present in the room rather than a self-paced online training course. While there are a lot of online training courses available in a whole host of subjects, at Orogen we feel on hands training with an expert works best, especially in a corporate environment.

Why? We hear you ask ...

While on the training course - as the delegates' progress, questions are often raised - which are answered immediately rather than having to wait for online support or a tutor to come back to you.

The training sessions can be used to problem solve issues with spreadsheets or a PowerPoint presentation or that Pivot table that just won't go right. Group sessions allow for colleague engagement and often, brainstorming ideas with new ways to improve documents become apparent. Thus making an employee's day more efficient.

Our training courses are designed to be fun, friendly and relaxed

- You learn as you go with laptops mirroring the trainer
- Course is paced to those in the room
- Any questions are welcome to the trainer no matter how trivial
- Extensive Course Notes are provided after the course
- The course is interactive with others in the room

Online Training via a webcam is however still a very useful commodity especially in this technological world. A

trainer can train from any location to people across the United Kingdom or even globally. This is particularly useful to organisations with multiple sites allowing delegates' to simply log on to specialised software and follow the course as if they were in the same room as the trainer.

Self-paced online training is also ideal for those who work out on the road or are employed on a self-employed basis. With juggling work and home life doing an online course at your own pace can allow out of hours learning in the comfort of your own home. However, often you have to wait for an online tutor to come back to you, if you are stuck or have any questions, these can take days to be answered. We have even heard reports of self-paced online training leaving those who have undertaken courses with gaps still in their knowledge.

At Orogen, we feel it is really best to book a certified trainer to come into your premises, be it in person or online, to provide the very best training experience and learning for your staff.

Remember, companies that invest in their staff as part of their personal and company development, are likely to retain those people thus reducing ongoing high recruitment costs.



Jo Humphrey



If you are interested in booking a training session with Orogen Computer Training - please contact **Jo Humphrey** by emailing info@oregentraining.com or please visit www.oregentraining.com for information on all the courses we cover.



Why you need to Delegate

Running a small business is not easy – we all know that by now, even if we didn't when we started! There are just so many different things that need doing. Apart from the obvious job of doing the actual work to provide the service you offer, there are lots of ancillary tasks that you have to do to keep the wheels turning and to stay out of trouble.

You need to keep your books and file your tax returns, market your business (which involves designing and printing business cards and flyers, building and promoting a web site, attending networking meetings, getting press coverage, and so on), comply with regulations (which could be trading standards, data protection laws, import/export regulations, etc.) – and so many other activities that I won't continue to list here.

So how do you find the time to do all this stuff, on top of keeping your clients or customers delighted by providing excellent levels of service? The answer of course is that it depends – in this case, on what skills you have. Some business owners will be entirely at home with keeping their own accounts up to date, while others will shudder at the mere thought. Some of you are no doubt arty enough to design your own logo, and won't need any external help with that. It's very much a case of "horses for courses"...

In a large corporation, there is usually a hierarchy, and senior managers often delegate time-consuming, menial or specialist tasks to more junior staff. It makes no sense for the CEO of a multi-national company to spend time lifting the floors to install a new telephone cable or putting in a new coffee machine him or herself. There are so much more valuable things for him or her to be doing with their time!

You may not have any staff in your business, or the staff you do have may not have the necessary skills for the job at hand – but that does not mean you should struggle on by yourself with something you know little to nothing about. Don't waste time that could be spent

much more productively playing to your strengths: delegate the job by outsourcing it to an expert.

If you have staff, then you will need to run payroll, and now also provide workplace pensions. These are specialist tasks, and are ideal for outsourcing to experts – especially as there is regulation to control who can perform this work. It really makes no sense for you to invest time and money in getting qualified as a payroll service provider, unless that is your actual business idea. Similarly, there are bookkeepers and accountants who can take away all the burden of tracking your finances, income and expenditure for you, and specialist graphic designers to come up with that snazzy new look you want. Struggling with the new GDPR and Data Protection Act that came in last year? Another perfect opportunity to hire an expert and get it sorted for you, instead of having sleepless nights worrying about possible fines.

Don't burn the candle at both ends trying to do work that you don't really understand – hand that off to a specialist, and focus on what you do best, which is servicing your clients and customers.



Richard Peers



Contact **Richard Peers** on email simplespider.co.uk

Are your with

Staff engagement is one of the key things to running a successful business, but do you know how engaged your staff really are?

Do they turn up at 9 am, do what you ask them to do and then leave at 5 pm or are they really an integral part of your business, engaging with what's going on, coming up with new ideas and getting really involved with the vision?

Having worked in a corporate environment when there were budget cuts on the agenda, I realised how important it was that everyone was on board with what was happening. Decisions about resources and services were made on the basis of what was good for the business and not on who might lose their job. There was an exercise to look at absolutely everything across the business which everyone was involved in from the lowest grades to the Head of Department. The results were quite surprising. Some of the lowest paid staff offered to take a pay cut in order to keep the central services such as HR, Finance and Office Services because they could see the value to the business of having those resources. Quite often the management think one thing about the business and the rest of the staff something completely different. I'm sure we've all experi-

staff engaged your business?

enced a “them and us” attitude where there is no trust and no big picture thinking but what if it was completely different?

How would you feel if everyone in your company shared the vision, was working for the same cause and pulling in the same direction? The culture would be amazing, everyone would be pulling together to get things done and the business was growing.

You can have that scenario in your business once you understand what everything thinks, fill in the gaps with training or just more communication. Communication is often the key to bringing everyone together. When you share information with your staff, they then understand why things happen, where they fit in to the bigger picture and how they can help achieve success.

Success is also something to be communicated and celebrated with everyone in your business. When was the last time you said thank you or just shared the good news? A little bit of credit goes a long way and doesn't need to cost a fortune.

If you'd like to know more and take a FREE survey to measure the staff engagement in your company, then please get in touch. Once you can see for yourself exactly what is going on, you can take action to fill any gaps and really see the progress that makes your company the one that everyone wants to work for.



Sally Marshall



Sally Marshall

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0777 171 4221

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“Success is also something to be communicated and celebrated with everyone in your business.”

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Business Break-ups

As an Outsourced Finance Director, I come across issues within business partnerships all the time, trying to resolve working relationships, mentoring and supporting partners with regards to trust issues, in the main.

This may be a break down in trust or one person doing more than their fair share of the workload. Or perhaps it just isn't working as they had hoped, but no one wants to address the situation head on.

Does this situation resonate with you? Do you feel under valued or that you are not given equal share or the level of respect and trust as others in the partnership? Don't ignore it – it will be impacting on your wellbeing and effect other areas of your life, not just your work. If you think this is happening to you get in touch, the initial consultation is free and strictly confidential.

Honesty and transparency from the start of a partnership can be the best policy, and tackling this on your own may seem daunting. Setting out procedures and processes to ensure that all parties are fully aware of each other's roles and responsibilities in the business is paramount.

Trust, respect and mutual responsibility, like not taking things for granted need to be established at the start of any business relationship. That way there are no grudges and no hidden agendas which could eat away and cause the breakdown of business relationships. Simple things like, equal pay, equal work load, defined responsibilities, safe guards to protect everyone involved. All aspects of your working relationship looked at and agreed to your specifications.

Asking for professional help and advice at the start of a business partnership is, in my opinion, priceless. It's not something you can Google and download a tick box sheet to complete. It's much more complex than that and you could save yourself of lot of money, pain and stress



by getting it right from the onset.

However, professional intervention when you know things are not going right is not a sign of weakness or lack of leadership. It could be the difference between success and failure. When you ask for help is not important, asking for professional help is vital at any stage of your business.

New year, new beginning, let 2019 be the year you reflect on your business partnership and how it's working and what's not working. Include everyone

in your plans for the business and share the responsibility. A happy team and workforce = a thriving business.



Colin
Bielckus



If you would like any help with your business plans for 2019 give me a call. Initial meeting is free. Tel: 01489 885555 or 07889 895602

Email: colin@the-ofd.com Web:

www.theoutsourcedfinancedirector.com

Miss MPS

DEATH TO VOICEMAIL...

Hail The Virtual Receptionist

Back in 1973, Stephen Boies of IBM was credited for inventing voicemail. Achieving over a million sales a year by the early '80s, voicemail was hailed as a miracle invention – a true boost to office productivity!

Fast forward to 2019, it's fair to say that enthusiasm for the voicemail has somewhat waned, with research saying 20% of people who have voicemail never listen to it, whilst a further 30% will happily leave unheard messages for 3 days.

Perhaps it's no surprise then that up to 80% of callers don't leave messages because they don't think they'll be heard. This presents an issue for small businesses – especially sole traders – as missing calls is sometimes an unavoidable aspect of the job, when you're trying to juggle multiple roles.

In a world of Instagram and instant gratification, people want to get stuff done now. With voicemail being viewed as archaic, the pressure is on to pick up the phone immediately before a potential customer heads back to Google to try your competitors instead.

"The pressure is on to pick up the phone immediately before a potential customer heads back to Google to try your competitors instead."

So what can a smaller business do about it?

Another major reason why people don't leave voicemails is that they want to talk to a human to verify what they've heard, read or otherwise found out about you, or they simply want the reassurance of speaking to a human.

In the knowledge that you aren't always able to pick up every call, it's therefore imperative that your website and marketing materials answer any question a would-be client may ask. This will reduce calls from researchers and increase calls from real buyers.

You can add to contact methods on top of your phone number to help buy you time – providing an email, Facebook page or number to WhatsApp (95%

people find a text message more convenient than leaving a voicemail) allows you vital minute minutes whilst still appearing responsive.

95% people find a text message more convenient than leaving a voicemail

However, if you really want to make the most of every call your business receives, then you need someone to pick up that call. The great news is that modern technology makes a call centre viable for any sized business.

Virtual Receptionist services are increasingly popular as it's an affordable way of dealing with all of your calls, without the cost of having full time staff. Internet based phone systems make it possible for a virtual receptionist to answer a call to your business number with connected software providing a script so – for the customer – it's as if they're talking to one of your own.

Virtual receptionist services are increasingly popular as it's an affordable way of dealing with all of your calls, without the cost of having full time staff.

With buyers evermore impatient and the cost of winning new business growing, improving sales conversions should be every businesses priority, no matter their size. That first step is having the means to answer every call, and then to reassure the caller that you are a professional, trusted outfit.

If you want to move away from the '80s, using the services of a Virtual Receptionist could be the answer. But first of all, check that voicemail!

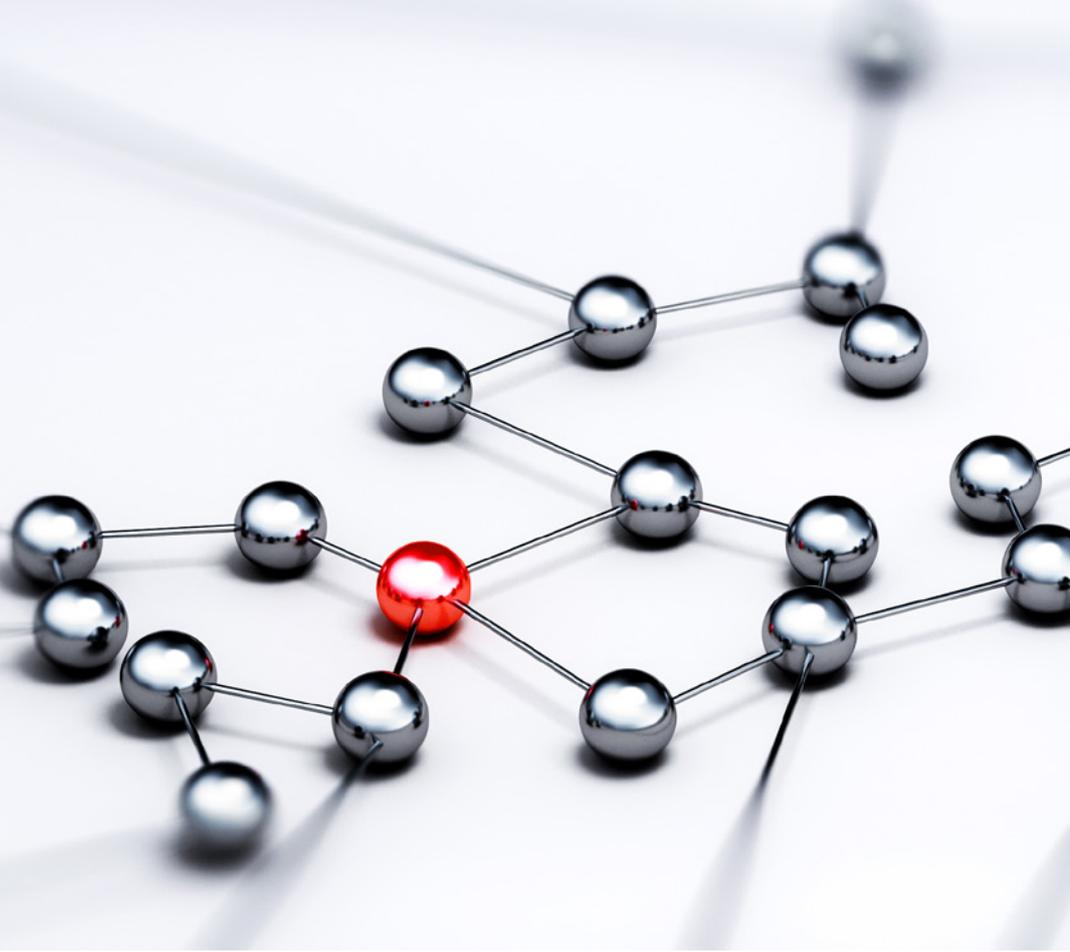


Clare Runham



Email **Clare Runham** at **clare@missmps.co.uk**.

Learn more about how Miss MPS helps small businesses at **www.missmps.co.uk**



The 'secret' solution

Business owners are always looking to find solutions to all sorts of problems that surface. We're always looking for CRM packages, project management solutions, business templates, analytical tools, and other software solutions to solve our various issues. We know that the

right software can make our lives easier, but where do we start? Do we buy the same thing others are using and squeeze our business into it? Can we even consider something bespoke, or is that just out of the question?

Have you considered a resource that you probably already have, and are likely underusing? Excel.

Many people switch off at the word 'spreadsheets', but they can be extremely useful in a business. They are not just for finance but are extremely versatile and can be used to create many different solutions for all sorts of applications. The beauty of Excel is that you can create something yourself, without needing to know any programming language, and it takes a fraction of the time to create.

I have created spreadsheets and applications for all sorts of businesses - from process tracking, to data analysis, as well as fun interactive spreadsheets to assist learning or training. Every time I think that I have made just about every spreadsheet possible, I get a call from another new client, with a request to make one that I have never thought of. Each business is unique, so you may have a requirement which others in your industry do not share. Software packages are made to serve the masses, and so many people end up purchas-



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in plain view

ing what is available, and then making it work for them. Ideally we should be using something which is bespoke to us, so that we can embrace our individuality and make our business stand out. This is almost impossible with bespoke software, as it is just too expensive to develop. That is not the case with spreadsheets.

Just to give you an idea: I have created spreadsheets before where I charged three figures, and the client then investigated getting the same solution made using programmed software, only to get quoted a five-figure sum! The exact same application. In fact, he sent them the spreadsheet and asked them what it would cost to make that as software. There are many reasons for this huge difference in price, which I won't go into now, just to say that it is much quicker to make a solution in Excel rather than programming it.

One of the main issues I come across is that people underestimate what Excel can do. They have played around with it a little, so they think that Excel is for storing data and adding up columns. When I show them some of the projects I have done (even the ones I did just for fun), they are completely shocked at what is possible. Even if you don't want a bespoke solution, if you'd rather buy a solution off the shelf, those are also available. Ready made spreadsheets that you can try before you buy, to suit all budgets.

So, what solutions does your business need? Are you already using Excel, but you just haven't considered it to be your solution? If you're capable of creating a solution within Excel, I would recommend that you do that. This way you have the right solution for your business. If you know what you want but can't do it yourself (or don't have the time), you can always come to a professional like me to do it for you. It's time to put that sleeping giant to work in your business.



Richard Sumner



Richard Sumner

Owner, Spreadsheet Solutions

<https://spreadsheetsolutions.biz>



Sittingbourne Company continue to invest in cutting-edge recycling machinery despite economic uncertainty

By Warren Dunham

One of the UK’s leading providers of waste management and recycling services, LKM Recycling in Sittingbourne, has invested over £1m in a new state of the art metal shear – the most powerful of its type in the UK. The machine is designed to cut and bale ferrous materials such as steel using 1250 tonnes of pressure. It also looks smart too – not something people generally say about machinery!

The Lefort Amazone 1250 machine was built in Belgium and expertly installed by their contractors just before Christmas and is now being commissioned with a view to doubling their monthly exports to mainland Europe, Turkey, India and the USA.

The Shear marks a turning point in LKM Recycling’s expansion plans as it is the final investment in a £5m strategy to drive the company forward. This will also lead to additional jobs being created at the Sittingbourne site as the new machine needs “feeding” at a much higher rate than the previous model.

This is great news for Sittingbourne, but also for the environment since the machine is highly efficient and reduces the amount of energy used to shear and bale materials as well as ensuring that the end product is of a high quality for steel mills to recycle into new objects such as construction beams.

Commenting, Ryan Eastwood Managing Director of LKM Recycling said, “This is our most important investment to date strategically. Our business was built on metal recycling, and it continues to be a significant part of the business for us. We are also very proud to be based in Sittingbourne where the company began and look to employ more local talent to support our growth.”



LKM recycling are experts in total waste and recycling management which includes ferrous and non-ferrous metals, plastics, UPVC double glazing, end of life vehicles, wood, glass, paper, skip hire and confidential destruction. For more information please go to lkm.org.uk/ or call them on **01795 439393**.

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Events APRIL

Company	Name	Date	Time	Location	Cost	To book your place
Omni Networking	Omni Whitstable	2nd Apr	7.30 am-9.30am	The Long Reach Beefeater Restaurant, Thanet Way, Whitstable CT5 3DB	£13	https://omnilocalbusinessnetworking.com/our-meetings/find-a-meeting/by-date?month=4&year=2019
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	After Hours Club	2nd Apr	6pm-7.30pm	The Conningbrook Hotel, Canterbury Road, Ashford, TN24 9QR	Free	https://www.kentinvictachamber.co.uk/events/after-hours-club-374/
Omni Networking	Omni Ashford	3rd Apr	7.30am - 9.30am	The Flying Horse, Wye Rd, Boughton Aluph, TN25 4HH	£13	https://omnilocalbusinessnetworking.com/our-meetings/find-a-meeting/by-date?month=4&year=2019
BMIM Cashflow	How to make SMART money decisions... even if you are a non-finance CEO	5th Apr	9.45am - 12.00	City Business Library, Guildhall, London, EC2V 7HH	£50	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/how-to-make-smart-money-decisionseven-if-you-are-a-non-finance-ceo-tickets-50849521287
Omni Networking	Omni South Croydon	9th Apr	7.30-9.30am	The Coombe Lodge, 104 Coombe Rd, Croydon	£13	https://omnilocalbusinessnetworking.com/our-meetings/find-a-meeting/by-date/meetings/1430-south-croydon-
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	After Hours Club	9th Apr	6pm-7.30pm	Burlington Hotel, 3-5 Earls Avenue, Folkestone, CT20 2HR	Free	https://www.kentinvictachamber.co.uk/events/after-hours-club-352/
E-Training	Leadership VS Management	11th Apr	10am - 12 noon	Barham Business Park, Valley Road, Barham CT4 6DQ		kim.carter@etraining-uk.com 07760 888498
Omni Networking	Omni Sevenoaks	12th Apr	7.30 am-9.30am	7 Hotel Diner, London Rd, Polhill, Halstad, Kent TN14 7AA	£13	https://omnilocalbusinessnetworking.com/our-meetings/find-a-meeting/by-date?month=4&year=2019
BMIM Cashflow	Cash Flow and Business Value: How to make more money	12th Apr		Central Working Victoria, 25, Eccleston Place, SW1W 9NF	Free	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cash-flow-and-business-value-how-to-make-more-money-tickets-55445080729
Omni Networking	Omni Whitstable	16th Apr	7.30 am-9.30am	The Long Reach Beefeater Restaurant, Thanet Way, Whitstable CT5 3DB	£13	https://omnilocalbusinessnetworking.com/our-meetings/find-a-meeting/by-date?month=4&year=2019
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	After Hours Club	16th Apr	6pm-7.30pm	Firmin Express Unit 10, Kemsley Fields Business Park, Sittingbourne ME10 2FE	Free	https://www.kentinvictachamber.co.uk/events/after-hours-club-362/
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	After Hours Club	17th Apr	6pm-7.30pm	Abbotts Barton Hotel 36 New Dover Road Canterbury, CT1 3DU	Free	https://www.kentinvictachamber.co.uk/events/after-hours-club-314/
Ladies Who Latte	LWL Ashford	18th Apr	10am - 12pm	The Farriers Arms, Church Road, Ashford TN25 6NU	Free	https://www.facebook.com/groups/383353965115057/ nikkiholy@aol.com
Omni Networking	Omni South Croydon	23rd Apr	7.30am-9.30am	The Coombe Lodge, 104 Coombe Rd, Croydon	£13	https://omnilocalbusinessnetworking.com/our-meetings/find-a-meeting/by-date/meetings/1430-south-croydon-breakfast
Metro Bank	Business to Business Networking	24th Apr	6pm-7.30pm	Metro Bank, 10 Week St, Maidstone ME14 1RN	Free	
E-Training	Developing your people	25th Apr	10am - 12pm	Barham Business Park, Valley Road, Barham CT4 6DQ	Free	kim.carter@etraining-uk.com 07760 888498
Omni Networking	Omni Sevenoaks	26th Apr	7.30 am-9.30am	7 Hotel Diner, London Rd, Polhill, Halstad, Kent TN14 7AA	£13	https://omnilocalbusinessnetworking.com/our-meetings/find-a-meeting/by-date?month=4&year=2019
The Business Terrace	HR & Recruitment	29th Apr	2.00pm-4.00pm	The Business Terrace Maidstone House, King St, Maidstone ME15 6JQ	Free	https://www.businessinmaidstone.co.uk/events/details/?id=302
Omni Networking	Omni Whitstable	30th Apr	7.30 am-9.30am	The Long Reach Beefeater Restaurant, Thanet Way, Whitstable CT5 3DB	£13	https://omnilocalbusinessnetworking.com/our-meetings/find-a-meeting/by-date?month=4&year=2019
The Business Terrace	Controlling Cash and Improving Profitability	30th Apr	10.00am-1.00pm	The Business Terrace Maidstone House, King St, Maidstone ME15 6JQ	Free	https://www.businessinmaidstone.co.uk/events/details/?id=319



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